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Cal-Fed action plan gets mixed reviews from environmental activists

By Larry Mitchell, staff writer

Environmental activists gave the Cal-Fed action plan for California water mixed reviews Friday.

Steve Evans, conservation chair of Friends of the River, said he viewed it as "the good, the bad and the ugly."

Among its best features are water conservation and recycling, he said.

In recent years, Los Angeles has implemented effective water conservation - for instance, making sure all water use is metered, so that every drop that's used is paid for, he said. As a result, the metropolis has made do without increasing its water use even though the population has continued to grow.

Evans, who used to live in Chico and now resides in Davis, said under the Cal-Fed plan, water conservation would be applied all over the state. Farmers' use of water ought to be metered to ensure it is used carefully, he said.

The plan's uglier parts have to do with reservoirs, he said.

The Sites Reservoir project in Colusa County would hold back water that normally would pour into the Sacramento River during times of high flow, he said. That would "reduce the driving force" of the river, which causes it to meander.

Also, the plan to raise Shasta Dam would flood perhaps a couple of miles of two important free-flowing streams, the McCloud River and the Upper Sacramento River, he said.

Bob Baiocchi, executive director of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, said raising Shasta Dam would be extremely controversial because it would eliminate portions of those two rivers and also part of the Pit

River.

"It will destroy habitat," he said. He called the Upper Sacramento River "a high-profile stream," noting that a lot of effort has gone into restoring the fishery there after it was killed several years ago when a train derailed and spilled toxic chemicals into the water.

Baiocchi, of Graeagle, was asked if he thought the plan really could adequately support fish and other wildlife, clean up the delta, provide ample and fresh drinking water for south-state urban areas, and supply enough water for agriculture, as a news release from the state Department of Water Resources claimed.

"Impossible," he said, laughing. "We'll see. I've got to read it."

John Merz of Chico, who heads the Sacramento River Preservation Trust, hadn't read the massive plan yet either, but he predicted, "The devil's in the details."

The proposal sets some broad policies, but includes many, many specific projects that will have to be haggled over in local areas, he said.

While some were claiming the plan could end the state's water wars, Merz was doubtful.

Many of these recommendations have been brought up before and have been bitterly opposed, he said. "There shouldn't be any assumptions made that the resistance is going to go away."